

BIBLE OLYMPICS

DAY ONE: WRESTLING
 JACOB WRESTLES THE ANGEL

Genesis 32:24-32; Hosea 12:3-5; Ephesians 6:12

Day Two: RUNNING THE RACE
 PAUL AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Hebrews 12:1-2; 2 Timothy 4:7-8

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Mark 6:45-51; Matthew 14:22-33

Theme: Olympics

Other Lessons: Elijah's Chariot Race (1 Kings 18); Archery (Jonathan Helps David [1 Sam. 20]); Shooting (David Kills Goliath) [1 Sam. 17]; Passing the Torch (Moses to Joshua, Elijah to Elisha, John to Jesus, Jesus to Apostles, Paul to Timothy)

BIBLE OLYMPICS

INTRODUCTION

The first recorded Olympic Games were held in Greece in the year 776 BC. However, it seems likely that these events had been going on for many years before the first record was made. Originally, the games consisted of only foot races. As time went on, other events were added – including boxing, wrestling, and even chariot racing. In 708 BC the pentathlon was introduced consisting of five feats – a foot race, discus throw, javelin throw, long jump, and wrestling match. As the Greek Empire grew, more and more athletes from around 100 cities competed in the games.

The modern Olympic Games date from 1896. Those first games were held in Athens, Greece with 280 athletes from 13 nations participating in 43 events. Like the ancient Olympics, the modern version continues to take place once every four years. Today, there are both Summer and Winter Olympic Games, each held two years apart.

The ancient Olympics were part of a religious festival to honor the Greek god Zeus. In fact, according to legend, the Olympic Games were founded by Hercules, the son of Zeus. They took place every four years between August 6 and September 19 at a sacred site called Olympia. Sadly, the modern Olympics still demonstrate connections to paganism and idolatry.

Around 140 BC, Greece was conquered by the rising Roman Empire. As a result, the Olympic Games began to decline though they would continue to be held. In AD 393, Theodosius was Emperor of Rome. Because he was a Christian, he called for an end to all pagan festivals – including the Olympics. Thus, for 1,500 years, there were no Olympic Games until they were revived in more modern times.

Since the Olympics are tied to paganism and false worship, why would they be the theme of Vacation Bible School? The answer is both simple and biblical. The games (and other competitions like them) were used by the Bible writers to illustrate important spiritual principles. Paul compared the Christian life to running a race, fighting an opponent, or competing for a prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; cf. Galatians 2:2; 5:7; Philippians 2:16; 3:10-14; 2 Timothy 4:7-8). In fact, the ASV translates Paul's words as referring to "every man that striveth in the games" (vs. 25). The writer of Hebrews also wrote of the Christian life as running in a race surrounded by a crowd of spectators (Hebrews 12:1-2). The "crown of life" is an image taken directly from athletic competitions where victors were rewarded with a crown made of leaves and flowers (cf. James 1:12; 1 Peter 5:4; Revelation 3:11).

This VBS is not about supporting the Olympics. Rather, it is about learning the lessons that can be gained from excellence in athleticism and competition. It is about self-control and discipline in training; stamina and endurance in performing; giving one's all to be one's best; and rejoicing in victory when the crown is won. This Vacation Bible School is about Bible Olympics!

Let the games begin!

BIBLE OLYMPICS

DAY ONE: WRESTLING

JACOB WRESTLES THE ANGEL

Genesis 32:24-32; Hosea 12:3-5; Ephesians 6:12

Introduction:

1. Wrestling was introduced as an Olympic sport in 708 BC!
 2. In the modern Olympic Games, wrestling has been a part of the events since the beginning in 1896 with one exception, the Olympics of 1900.
 - a. Freestyle wrestling was added in 1904.
 - b. Women's wrestling was added in 2004.
 3. The goal of wrestling is to defeat one's opponent by a fall (pin), technical superiority, judges' decision, or by causing injury.
 4. As it is used in the Bible, wrestling symbolizes the struggles of man with evil, both internally and externally, in the forms of temptation, persecution, and sin.
 5. However, the story of Jacob provides a different view of wrestling; for, Jacob wrestled with God.
- I. Jacob the Wrestler
- A. Jacob was a twin and, in our first introduction to him, he wrestled with his brother Esau in their mother's womb (Gen. 25:22).
 - B. At his birth, he came forth with his hand on his brother's heel (Gen. 25:26).
 - C. Thus, he was named Jacob – meaning, "Heel catcher," or "Heel holder" implying the idea of a "supplanter" or "one who trips another."
 1. Of course, this is also a wrestling term.
 2. It is an attempt to take down another by grabbing the foot.
 - D. Jacob demonstrated this character trait in relation to the promise of God.
 1. Before they were born, God prophesied that the older Esau would serve the younger Jacob (Gen. 25:23).
 - a. In fact, God was referring to the nations that would come from the twins.
 - b. The nation of Edom (from Esau) would serve the nation of Israel (from Jacob) [cf. 2 Samuel 8:14; Obadiah; Malachi 1:2-5].
 2. In relation to the two boys, this meant that God had chosen Jacob to be the heir of the promise made to Abraham (Romans 9:6-16).
 - E. Though God had made His promise, Jacob was not content to trust God to keep His Word.
 - F. So, Jacob schemed and plotted to take away the birthright and the blessing from his brother Esau.
 1. First, he used his brother's hunger to manipulate him out of his birthright (Gen. 25:29-34).
 - a. It is important to note that Esau is the one condemned in Scripture for what happened here (vs. 34; Hebrews 12:15-17).
 - b. He is called 'profane' because he did not care about holy things.
 - c. He was concerned with the physical rather than the spiritual.
 - d. He did not fight to keep his birthright but gave it away for nothing!

2. Next, he deceived his father and undermined his brother to receive the blessing (Genesis 27).
- G. It may seem that Jacob was wrestling with Esau; however, he actually was wrestling with God.
 1. When God declared to Jacob that the promise now applied to him, Jacob declared, "Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not" (Gen. 28:16).
 2. Furthermore, he stated, "If God will be with me... then shall the Lord be my God" (Genesis 28:20-22).
 3. In Laban's household, he learned what it was like to be on the other end of someone's scheming and deception (Genesis 29 – 31).
 4. Even when returning to the land of Canaan, though his faith had grown, Jacob still was wrestling with his trust in God (Genesis 32:7-23).
- H. Finally, God intervened to teach Jacob a vital lesson about wrestling with God...

II. Jacob Wrestles with God (Genesis 32:24-32)

- A. After Jacob sent his family away to protect them from what he thought Esau might do, he was left all alone.
- B. The Bible states: "[A]nd there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of day."
 1. Later, Jacob asked this "man" to bless him and the "man" change Jacob's name to Israel (vs. 26-28).
 2. Also, the "man" refused to give his name to Jacob.
 3. After this event, Jacob declared that he had "seen God face to face."
 4. Hosea referred to this "man" as "the angel" (Hosea 12:4).
 5. However, this was obviously no mere angel.
 6. In fact, Hosea went on to call Him "the LORD God of hosts" (Hos. 12:5).
 7. He is called an angel because He was delivering a message to Jacob (the word 'angel' means, "Messenger").
 8. Jacob was wrestling with God!
- C. All night long until the dawn began to break, Jacob wrestled with God and could not defeat Him.
- D. However, the truly amazing part of this story is the fact that God could not defeat Jacob!
 1. Clearly, God was more powerful than Jacob.
 2. By simply touching his hip socket (*the hollow of his thigh*), God caused Jacob's leg to be "out of joint" (dislocated and strained).
 3. However, God would not force Himself to be victorious over Jacob.
 - a. Man's submission and surrender to God must be of his own free choice.
 - b. God may, through His providence, affect the situations of life to draw men to Him.
 - c. But He does not force anyone to love, follow, or obey Him.
- E. Though injured, Jacob continued holding on to God until he received a blessing.
 1. In fact, he had to hold on to God for he could not stand on his own.
 2. His asking for a blessing was his acknowledgment of his dependence upon God – even for his strength to stand.
 3. Yet, it revealed the strength of Jacob's character and persistent nature.
- F. As a result, God changed his name from Jacob to Israel.
 1. The name Jacob means, "Supplanter."
 2. The name Israel means, "Prince that prevails with God."
- G. Hosea explains that Jacob found true strength (and its true source) when he wept and prayed to Jehovah (Hosea 12:3-5).

- H. Jacob had learned a valuable – even essential – lesson: The only way to win when wrestling with God is to surrender to Him.
 - 1. In the sport of wrestling, the one who gives up loses the match.
 - 2. In spiritual wrestling, the one who submits is the winner!

III. Lessons Learned

- A. Jacob's time of wrestling with doubt and struggling with selfishness were over.
- B. He was reunited with his brother Esau in joy and brotherly love (Gen. 33).
- C. He settled back in the Promised Land of Canaan, enjoying the blessings of God.
- D. He had learned his role in relation to God – the same as all men...
 - 1. Philippians 2:12 – We must use our strength to serve God.
 - 2. Philippians 2:13 – We must never forget our dependence upon God.
- E. His desire for the spiritual birthright and blessing was right, but his means of acquiring them was wrong.
- F. His godly desire had to be channeled through godly faith and obedience.
- G. We must remember that our struggle is a spiritual one (Ephesians 6:12).
 - 1. We wrestle against the temptations of the Devil.
 - 2. We wrestle against the persecutions of our enemies.
 - 3. We wrestle against the trials of our faith.
- H. The only way to win the spiritual fight is to surrender to God!
 - 1. By standing in His strength (Ephesians 6:10)
 - 2. By putting on His armor (Ephesians 6:11-17)
 - 3. By fighting with His weapon (Ephesians 6:17)
 - 4. By praying to His throne (Ephesians 6:18)
- I. When we submit to Him, He will give us the victory...
 - 1. Over our temptations (James 4:6-8)
 - 2. Over our persecutions (James 4:9)
 - 3. Over our trials (James 4:10)
- J. To win the struggle, surrender to the Lord!

BIBLE OLYMPICS

Day Two: RUNNING THE RACE

PAUL AND THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

1 Corinthians 9:24-27; Hebrews 12:1-2; 2 Timothy 4:7-8

Introduction:

1. The foot race has been a part of the Olympics since its very beginning.
2. In fact, in the first Olympic Games the foot race was the only event.
3. The goal of a race is to run faster and to finish more quickly than one's competitors.
4. However, in a race like a marathon, there is success in just being able to finish the race.
5. The Christian life is often compared to a race.
6. But victory is found in a successful run to the finish line.
7. It is not a competition with others, but a contest with one's self.

I. The Christian Race: *Following Jesus*

(Hebrews 12:1-4)

A. Jesus is our goal.

1. Hebrews 12:2 – *Looking unto Jesus*
2. To endure unto the end, we must keep our eyes on the goal.
 - a. Matthew 14:23-33 – *Peter walking on the water*
 - b. When he kept his eyes on the goal, he succeeded.
 - c. When he turned his focus to the storm, he began to sink.
 - d. This focus – or, endurance – is a spiritual discipline.
 - i. That means it requires training and exercise!
 - ii. That was the problem with many of the disciples (John 6).
 - aa. How many choose a church based on personal desires?
 - bb. How many want Heaven to fit their wishes?
 - iii. That was the problem with the Hebrews (12:3-4).
 - e. We must not focus on the storm, but on the Savior and His power over the storm.

B. Jesus is our example.

1. This is the real emphasis of Hebrews 12:1-4.
 - a. The “great cloud of witnesses” are the faithful of Hebrews 11.
 - b. But our true example is Jesus – the Author and Finisher of our faith.
 - i. Author – *chief leader, prince; example, pioneer* (Heb. 2:9-10)
 - ii. Finisher – *one who perfects, consummates* (Heb. 5:8-9)
 - iii. Note that the word “our” is supplied (in italics).
2. Jesus is our example in discipline.
 - a. The Hebrews were to lay aside every weight that would hinder their run.
 - b. Jesus disciplined and prepared Himself for faithful service.
 - c. In study (Luke 2:46-49; 4:1-13)
 - d. In prayer (Luke 22:41-46)
3. Jesus is our example in faith.
 - a. The Hebrews were to lay aside the besetting sin of unbelief.

- b. Unbelief and doubt constantly surrounds the Christian.
 - i. Matthew 16:16, 22-23 – *Peter*
 - ii. Matthew 17:1, 16-21; Mark 9:23-24; Heb. 3:19 – *The disciples believed in God, but they did not believe God.*
- c. Matthew 27:46
- 4. Jesus is our example in endurance.
 - a. He endured the cross (vs. 2).
 - b. We can endure tests, trials, and persecutions (vs. 3-4).

II. The Christian Race: *Practicing Discipline* (1 Corinthians 9:24-27)

- A. There is a danger of drifting from the right path (Hebrews 2:1).
- B. Consider the example of the men in the parable of the Good Samaritan...
 - 1. The characters of the parable.
 - a. The Thieves – *Some “bad guys” are easy to recognize.*
 - b. The Priest – *Didn’t do “bad,” but refused to do “good.”*
 - c. The Levite – *Willful neglect of his duty and basic compassion*
 - 2. The drifting of the Priest
 - a. He was a servant of God, of the Temple and of the people.
 - b. He was commanded to show mercy (Deut. 22:1-4; Isa. 58:1-7).
 - 3. Yet, the priests had drifted from their God and their purpose (Mal. 1:6-14; 2:1-9).
 - a. No fear or honor of God
 - b. Unworthy offerings
 - c. No heart of service
 - d. Ritualism, legalism, complaining
 - e. Not teaching God’s Word (or, corrupting it)
 - 4. The drifting of the Levite
 - a. He was a servant of the priests.
 - b. Yet, he had drifted from his purpose – a servant of God who would not serve his fellow man.
 - c. Remember the hatred of the Jews toward the Samaritans, Gentiles and all sinners (Matt. 9:10-13; Luke 7:37-48; 13:1-5; 15:1-2; 18:9-14).
 - 5. The drifting of the Lawyer
 - a. He was a student of and “expert” in the Law of Moses (Luke 11:45-46).
 - b. Yet, he was complacent and arrogant in his religious life.
 - c. He sought to tempt Jesus and to justify himself.
 - 6. The Christian life is a race that must be run continually – with no time for drifting into complacency or apathy.
- C. In order to keep from drifting, one must practice self-discipline (1 Cor. 9:24-27).
 - 1. First, one must be willing to give his all – full commitment!
 - 2. Next, one must keep his eye on the goal – determined focus!
 - 3. Also, one must be temperate in all things – devoted discipline!
 - 4. Then, one must remember his purpose – pure motivation!
 - 5. Finally, one must protect against his weaknesses – honest perception!
- D. To successfully run and finish the Christian race, we must have spiritual discipline.
 - 1. Spiritual exercise (Acts 24:16; 1 Tim. 4:7-8; Heb. 5:12-14)
 - 2. Living the Christian life takes daily work!
- E. There are several things we need in order to run the Christian race.

1. Knowledge of the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15; cf. John 15:7-8; Col. 3:16; Psa. 1:1-3; Josh. 1:8; Prov. 2:1-6; Psa. 119:11; Deut. 6:6-7)
 2. Determination to mature (2 Pet. 3:18; 1 Pet. 2:2; 2 Thes. 1:3)
 3. A plan for resisting the devil (1 Cor. 9:24-27; Eph. 6:10-17)
 4. Prayer (Phil. 4:4-9)
 5. An evangelistic heart (Matt. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 17:30-31)
 6. A compassionate, benevolent heart (Gal. 6:9-10)
 7. Faithfulness in all things (Rev. 2:10)
- F. All of these require continual exercise and discipline.

- III. The Christian Race: *Finishing Strong* (2 Timothy 4:6-8)
- A. Paul had come to the end of his time on earth, for he was soon to be executed for preaching the Gospel of Christ.
 - B. He declared that he was already being poured out as an offering to the Lord, meaning the sacrifice of his life had begun (vs. 6).
 - C. Yet, as he looked back over his life, he declared that he had faithfully finished the race (vs. 7).
 1. He had fought a good fight – by engaging the enemies of God and Truth.
 2. He had finished the course – by faithfully serving God and his neighbor.
 3. He had kept the faith – by never abandoning the Lord or His Gospel.
 - D. Because he had lived a faithful (not perfect) life, Paul knew that he would receive the reward of victory – the crown of life.
 1. There are two Greek words for ‘crown’ used in the New Testament.
 2. One is *diadema* (διαδημα) – referring to a crown of authority worn by a king (cf. Rev. 12:3; 13:1; 19:12).
 3. The other is *stephanos* (στεφανος) – referring to a crown of victory, like those awarded in the games.
 4. The crown given to the victor of a race was usually made of entwined leaves and flowers.
 5. The crown given to the victor of the Christian race is entwined with righteousness (2 Tim. 4:8), endurance (Jam. 1:12), glory (1 Pet. 5:4), and life (1 Cor. 9:25)!
 - E. One begins the race by becoming a Christian.
 - F. One continues the race by living the Christian life.
 - G. One finishes the race by remaining faithful unto death.

BIBLE OLYMPICS

Day Three: WEIGHTLIFTING

SAMSON SHOWS HIS STRENGTH

Judges 16

Introduction:

1. Throughout history, men have competed with one another to see who could lift the greater weight.
2. When it first became a part of the ancient Olympics is unknown.
3. When the modern Olympics began, weightlifting was a part of them from the very beginning in 1896.
4. In three Olympic Games (1900, 1908, and 1912), weightlifting was not included.
5. In the early games, weightlifting was a part of the track and field events; but, since 1920, it has been its own Olympic competition.
6. Biblically, it is more important to have and to gain spiritual strength than physical.
7. However, the story of Samson teaches important lessons about both kinds of strength.
8. Samson was physically strong, yet he struggled to gain spiritual strength.

I. Samson's Physical Strength

- A. Samson lived during the time of the Judges – a time of spiritual weakness among the nation of Israel.
- B. He was chosen by God to be a Judge (deliverer or savior) of Israel, to rescue them from the oppression of the Philistines.
- C. In order to accomplish this, God blessed Samson with tremendous physical strength.
 1. He killed a lion with his bare hands (Judges 14:5-6).
 2. He killed 30 men of Ashkelon (Judges 14:19-20).
 3. He caught 300 foxes and used them to burn the Philistine fields (15:4-5).
 4. He broke the rope his hands were tied with and killed 1,000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey (15:14-16).
 5. He picked up and carried the gates of the city of Gaza (16:3).
 - a. The Hebrew word here can mean to pluck up; much like one removes the pegs of a tent.
 - b. It seems that Samson pulled the gates and their supports up from the ground.
 - c. He then put them on his shoulders and carried them to the top of a hill. *{If this was all the way to Hebron, it was a distance of 30+ miles.}*
 - d. Keep in mind that the gates of a city were often covered in metal to protect them from burning.
 - e. For someone to “capture the gates” of a city meant defeat and surrender, for their means of protection was lost.
 - f. In essence, Samson had conquered the city of Gaza – by himself (of course, with God's help).
 - g. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus said that the “gates of hell (*hades*)” would not prevail against the church.

- h. In other words, through Him the church would conquer death, Hell and Satan! {*Jesus did spiritually (though literally) what Samson did physically.*}
- 6. He broke 7 green ropes (bowstrings) and new rope that had been used to bind him (16:7-9, 11-12).
- 7. He destroyed a loom with his hair (16:13-14).
- 8. He brought down a Philistine temple by toppling its support pillars (16:29-30).
- D. In spite of this, it was up to Samson to develop his spiritual strength.

II. Samson's Spiritual Weakness

- A. The attitude of the people during the time of the Judges is stated twice in the book of Judges: "Every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (17:6; 21:25).
- B. Sadly, Samson embraced the thinking of the day and often sought what he wanted instead of what God commanded.
 - 1. He wanted to marry a Philistine woman (14 – 15).
 - 2. He visited a Philistine prostitute (16:1-3).
 - 3. He loved Delilah, probably a Philistine, possibly a prostitute (16:4-20).
- C. As a result of his spiritual weakness, Samson lost his physical strength.
- D. He was captured by the Philistines and blinded (16:18-21).
- E. Samson had finally entered into spiritual darkness.
 - 1. He had hardened his heart against the Lord and driven Him out (Revelation 3:20).
 - 2. He had grieved the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30).
 - 3. His sins separated him from God (Isaiah 59:1-2).
- F. This manifested itself in the form of physical darkness – Samson was blinded by the Philistines.
 - 1. It was only when he lost his physical eyesight that Samson truly began to see.
 - 2. He was no longer looking at Philistine women, but now he was taking a good, hard look at himself.
 - 3. What was "right in his own eyes" had caused him to lose them!
- G. Samson was bound and treated as an animal – given a job usually reserved for women, slaves or donkeys. {*Blind, Bind, Grind*}
 - 1. Samson had hit rock bottom.
 - 2. Like Jonah, he was in the belly of the whale.
 - 3. Like the Prodigal Son, he was in the pigpen.
 - 4. Like Peter, he had denied the Lord and was weeping bitterly.
- H. However, there was still hope for Samson – he began to allow his hair to grow again.
 - 1. This does not mean to imply that his hair was the source of his strength.
 - 2. God was always the source of Samson's power.
 - 3. But the hair was symbolic of his devotion to God that gave him access to this power.
 - 4. His hair beginning to grow again indicates that Samson has renewed his vow – it is a sign of repentance.
- I. Even though Samson repented, he still had to suffer the consequences of his sins.
 - 1. As the Philistines celebrated their victory over Samson by praising their false god Dagon, Samson was the source of entertainment.
 - 2. It is sad how far Samson has fallen.

- a. Warren Wiersbe writes, “Instead of bringing glory to the God of Israel, Samson gave the enemy opportunity to honor their false god.”
 - b. “Dagon was the god of grain, and certainly the Philistines remembered what Samson had done to their fields.”
 - 3. The Hebrew indicates that they laughed at him in derision and contempt.
 - 4. It could mean that they used him as a means of laughter for themselves.
- J. Finally, Samson prayed to God that he would be given great strength one more time.
 - 1. What a change is seen in Samson’s attitude!
 - 2. He uses three different words for God in his prayer.
 - a. *Adonai* – Lord
 - b. *Jehovah* – GOD
 - c. *Elohim* - God
 - 3. He prayed for the Lord to remember him, showing his need for fellowship with God.
 - 4. He prayed for God to strengthen him, showing his dependence upon God and his acknowledgment of God as the source of his strength.
 - 5. He prayed for vengeance upon the Philistines.
- K. God granted his request and Samson caused the two middle pillars of the house to fall, resulting in the collapse of the entire structure.
- L. Thus, Samson died doing battle with the Philistines – killing more in his death than he had done in the battles he fought earlier in his life.

III. Lessons Learned

- A. Godly parents and good parenting do not guarantee obedient children.
 - 1. Samson should have listened to his parents (Proverbs 1:8; 6:20; 30:17; Jeremiah 35:14; Luke 2:51; Ephesians 6:1-3).
 - 2. However, his parents were not held accountable for his mistakes and sins (Ezekiel 18:20).
- B. Be careful of your friendships.
 - 1. 1 Corinthians 15:33
 - 2. Samson became friends with God’s enemies!
- C. Be careful who you date and marry.
 - 1. 2 Corinthians 6:14
 - 2. Samson wanted to marry a child of the devil.
- D. “Abstain from all appearance of evil” (1 Thessalonians 5:22).
 - 1. Samson seemed to try to get as close to sin as he could without “going too far.”
 - 2. Instead, we are to avoid evil wherever it appears!
- E. Vengeance belongs to the Lord.
 - 1. The Israelites might have rallied behind a man who was leading them in carrying out God’s punishment of the Philistines and deliverance of His people.
 - 2. It is hard to support someone who seems to be after his own petty revenge.
- F. A contrast between Samson and John the Baptist...
 - 1. Birth foretold by an angel (Luke 1:11-13)
 - 2. Separated from the womb (Luke 1:14-15)
 - 3. Divinely appointed (Luke 1:16-17)
 - 4. God was with him (Luke 1:66)
 - 5. John was selflessly devoted to his work (Luke 1:80)

6. John was highly disciplined (Mark 1:6; Luke 7:24-26)
7. John was humble and passionate (Luke 3:7-14)
8. John always gave glory to God & Christ (Luke 3:15-17)
9. John was faithful unto death (Mark 6:27-28)
10. May we imitate John more than we imitate Samson.

BIBLE OLYMPICS

Day Four: SWIMMING

JONAH AND THE GREAT FISH

Jonah 1 – 4

Introduction:

1. Swimming competitions were a part of the first modern Olympic Games in 1896 and have remained such ever since.
2. The story of Jonah is really not a story about swimming.
3. Jonah did not have much time to swim before he was swallowed by a great fish!
4. However, there are many important lessons that can be learned from a study of his life and the book that bears his name.
5. If we do not learn to swim with God, we will sink!

Background:

1. Author—Jonah, “*Dove*.”
2. Date—around 780 BC (about 50 years after Joel).
3. Theme—***Jehovah Is Lord of ALL!***
4. Key Verse—1:9 or 4:2
5. Summary—*Jonah’s prophecy is against the people of Nineveh, but the lesson of the book is really aimed at Israel. It is the story of one of God’s prophets who learns that God is the God of all.*

I. THE BACKGROUND

- A. The prophet, Jonah:
 1. He is mentioned only one other time in the Old Testament, 2 Kings 14:23-29, as a prophet during the reign of Jeroboam II
 2. His home was in the town of Gath-hepher, located about four miles northeast of what would be Nazareth.
 3. During the reign of Jeroboam II, Jonah seems to have been the most noted prophet.
 4. Thus, there was perhaps no better person to send to preach to the Gentiles of Nineveh than Jonah.
- B. The city, Nineveh: suffice it to say, this was a wicked and cruel nation.
- C. The prejudiced Jews:
 1. Already, during the reign of Jeroboam II, Israel was forced to pay tribute to Assyria (Nineveh was the capitol city).
 2. Simply put, Jonah did not want to preach to the people of Nineveh because he did not want them to be spared.

II. THE PROPHECY

- A. Running From God (1:1-16)
 1. Jonah was commanded by God to go and preach to the city of Nineveh.
 2. Instead, Jonah chose to flee in the opposite direction to Tarshish.
 3. As he travelled by ship, God caused a wind to keep them from moving.
 4. Finally, Jonah admitted what he had done and was thrown overboard.

5. When this was done, the storm immediately ceased.
 6. God had prepared a great fish and it swallowed Jonah.
 7. Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for 3 days and nights.
- B. Running To God (1:17-2:10)
1. As a result of his situation, Jonah prayed to God.
 2. This indicated his sorrow over his decision and his repentance.
 3. From the very depths of the sea, God heard Jonah's prayer.
 4. God commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah out on dry ground.
- C. Running With God (3:1-10)
1. Again, God commanded Jonah to go and preach to Nineveh.
 2. This time Jonah obeyed and did what God asked.
 3. As a result of his preaching, God's will was accomplished.
 4. The people of Nineveh repented and were spared by God.
- D. Running Ahead of God (4:1-11)
1. When Jonah saw this, he was angry.
 2. Jonah wanted what God did not – the destruction of Nineveh.
 3. He went outside of the city and pouted in his anger.
 4. God chastised him and taught him to love his neighbor.

III. THE LESSONS

- A. God is the God of all—nature, animals, plants, and all nations!
- B. You can't run from God (Psalm 139:7-12)
- C. God answers prayer.
- D. There is power in God's Word—even when it comes from a preacher with a bad attitude!
- E. God demands that His people be a forgiving people who love their neighbors and their enemies.
- F. God is a loving and merciful God, willing to forgive.

Conclusion:

1. God is longsuffering and wants to forgive.
2. Yet, we must choose to run to Him and with Him—not from Him or ahead of Him.
3. Do you fear the LORD, the God of Heaven?

BIBLE OLYMPICS

Day Five: ROWING

THE DISCIPLES ON THE STORMY SEA

Mark 6:45-51; Matthew 14:22-33; John 6:14-21

Introduction:

1. Rowing has been a part of the Olympic Games since 1900.
 - a. It was scheduled to be an event in the first modern Olympics in 1896.
 - b. However, due to bad weather, the competition was not able to be held.
 2. It is possible that rowing contests were held in ancient Egypt as far back as 1430 BC.
 3. Many of Jesus' apostles had previously worked as fishermen for their livelihoods.
 4. Thus, they were well acquainted with rowing and other skills needed for sailing, especially on the Sea of Galilee.
 5. However, on one occasion, their skills were not enough to overcome a strong, contrary wind.
- I. The Disciples' Dilemma
- A. Jesus had performed an amazing miracle by feeding about 5,000 men (not counting women and children) with only 5 loaves and 2 fish.
 - B. After this miracle, he instructed His disciples to sail across the Sea of Galilee to Bethsaida.
 - C. Then, He sent the multitudes away and went up into a mountain alone to pray.
 - D. While He was praying, the disciples were struggling on the sea.
 1. A wind had arisen that was contrary to them.
 2. This means that it was blowing in the opposite direction from the one they were attempting to travel.
 3. John states that the "sea arose" due to these strong winds, causing great waves and danger (John 6:18 – literally, the sea was awakening).
 - E. John tells us that they had rowed about 25 or 30 furlongs.
 1. According to Jewish reckoning, 7½ furlongs was about 1 mile.
 2. The Sea of Galilee is less than 10 miles across at its widest point (usually about 6 miles or 40 furlongs).
 3. Thus, they were literally stuck in the middle of the sea, even though the disciples were "toiling in rowing" (Mark 6:47-48).
 - F. Furthermore, they had been rowing for a long time – into the 4th watch of the night.
 1. The Jews divided the night into three watches of four hours each.
 2. The Romans divided the night into four watches of three hours each.
 3. So, the 4th watch was between 3:00 and 6:00 a.m. (cf. Mark 13:35).
 4. If they began their journey at sundown, they had been rowing on the sea for at least 8 hours, possibly for almost 12!
 5. When Mark says that they were "toiling," the word he uses literally means, "To torture; pain, toil, torment; vexed or distressed."
 6. One can imagine how their arms and backs must have ached after rowing against the wind for so many hours.
 - G. In spite of the difficulty, they did not give up – the disciples kept rowing!

- II. The Master's Miracle
- A. In the midst of their struggle, Jesus came to them.
 - B. With amazement they realized that He was walking on the water!
 - C. At first, this made them frightened, and they thought they were seeing a ghost.
 - D. However, Jesus spoke to them and said, "It is I; be not afraid."
 - E. Understanding that it truly was Jesus, Peter asked the Lord to command him to come to Him by also walking on the water!
 - 1. Jesus simply said, "Come."
 - 2. Peter climbed out of the boat and walked on the water to go to Jesus!
 - 3. When he lost his focus and began to look at the storm and the waves around him, Peter began to sink.
 - 4. Jesus immediately reached out his hand and rescued Peter.
 - F. When Peter and Jesus got into the boat, the wind immediately ceased, and the ship was instantaneously transported to their destination on the other side of the sea.
 - G. As a result of the miracle, they worship Jesus and declared that He is the Son of God.

- III. The Lessons Learned
- A. When you are obeying the Lord, sometimes things will be difficult.
 - B. However, we must never give up – the Lord is with us, and He will see us through.
 - 1. Wrestling – When we are wrestling with temptation and doubt...
 - 2. Running – When we are struggling to reach the goal of Heaven...
 - 3. Weightlifting – When we are carrying heavy burdens...
 - 4. Swimming – When we are trying to stay afloat among persecution...
 - 5. Rowing – When we are hurting and exhausted in our service...
 - C. With Jesus by our side, we can accomplish His will and do great things in His service!

BIBLE OLYMPICS

Conclusion

We expect physical competition to be disciplined and strenuous. We know the saying: “No pain, no gain.” We understand how athletes must train, focus, and work in preparation for game day. We recognize how they must exert themselves and give their all in order to achieve victory. We celebrate with them when the goal is reached and champions are crowned.

However, we often fail to understand how these same principles apply to our spiritual lives. Living the Christian life is the greatest of competitions. (*We do not compete with others, but with ourselves.*) It deserves and demands the same focus, discipline, and effort that an athletic event requires. In fact, it warrants more, for the stakes are much higher. Paul declared: “Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible” (1 Corinthians 9:25). We are fighting for our eternal souls! We are striving for Heaven!

Take the lessons for this week’s studies and strengthen yourself for the true Olympic competition – the spiritual Olympics of the soul. Give your all in your service to God. The victory will be yours! Heaven will be your eternal home!